



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
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Dear Colleague:

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) is currently developing a statewide educational initiative for the general public that will build upon and complement ongoing efforts for both seasonal influenza prevention and pandemic planning in MA. The *Flu Facts: What You Need to Know* statewide educational campaign launched in October 2006 was the beginning of a concentrated effort to educate residents about flu and pandemic flu. This new program can be viewed as an extension of last year's efforts but with a specific focus.

The initiative is titled ***Flu: What You Can Do – Caring for People at Home***. The primary objectives are:

- To increase the knowledge of the general public regarding the similarities and differences between seasonal and pandemic flu;
- To provide the general public with the information and tools to care for persons with mild influenza at home; and
- To provide the general public with information and tools to simplify their communication with health care providers and help determine when emergency medical help is indicated.

There will be a reinforcement of the message that caring for a family member, or someone you live with, during a pandemic will be very similar to what the general public already does during each regular flu season. One of the end goals of the initiative is to reduce the potential surge of patients seeking care at hospital emergency rooms and alternative care sites during a pandemic.

The initiative is built around an informational booklet and a short video for the general public, as well as a training program for local public health professional staff, MRC volunteers, school nurses and other community partners. Upon completion of the training, participants will be able to implement strategies for using the video and booklet to educate residents and organizations in their communities. This program is being managed through the Local Public Health Institute of Massachusetts in collaboration with MDPH, the Boston Public Health Commission and other partners representing local public health and the health care provider community.

Many partners across the state will play a role in the implementation and success of this initiative. As a local public health professional, what do you need to know?

- The program will be launched in November 2007.
- One copy of the video (in DVD format) will be sent to all cable access stations and each local board of health.
- A quantity (yet to be determined) of booklets will be sent to multiple locations including local boards of health, community health centers, and school nurses. An order form will be made available to these and other entities to order additional copies.
- Approximately 12-15 sessions of the training program will be scheduled in late November 2007 – February 2008 (in each emergency preparedness region). Through outreach and promotion, MDPH instructors will be

enrolling, on a voluntary basis, the audiences mentioned above for the training and developing 'educational teams'. The instructors will train the teams on the content, show the video, review the booklet, and strategize how the program can be implemented locally. Booklets and videos will be available for participants at the training. If interested in participating, you will find more detailed information on the Local Public Health Institute by mid-October. The URL is [www.masslocalinstitute.org](http://www.masslocalinstitute.org)

- The booklet and video will be formatted for the web and posted on the MDPH website.
- With the current funding, the booklet and video will be translated into Spanish and made available on the MDPH website.

Please note that this program will continue and expand each year, dependent on funding. Through outreach and promotion, other audiences will be brought into the 'educational teams'. Translation and printing of the booklet and video into other languages will be done over time. Evaluation will also be conducted.

I hope that you will join us in this important effort. We will continue to update you as the campaign moves forward. In the meantime, questions can be addressed to Barbara Coughlin, RN, Health Educator from MDPH, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (413) 586-7525, x1165 or [barbara.coughlin@state.ma.us](mailto:barbara.coughlin@state.ma.us)

Thank you,

John Auerbach  
Commissioner